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EDUCATION WEEK

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Center To Publish Detailed Plan for Teaching History

Document Seen Swaying Standards-Setting Effort

By Debra Viadero

The National Center for History in the Schools is set to publish a plan for teaching history that lays out in massive detail, for virtually the first time, one group's view of what students across the nation should know about the subject and why they should study it.

The 311-page document, entitled "Lessons from History: Essential Understandings and Historical Perspectives Students Should Acquire," was developed over four years by a team of prominent scholars and educators. Its publication by the federally funded center for history, based at the University of California at Los Angeles, comes as policymakers and educators are debating setting national standards for what students should know and be able to do in most subjects.

The document, which is to be released in the coming weeks, is expected to influence the development of such standards in history.

A number of national commissions have called for revisions in teaching history in recent years and a handful of states—most notably California—have developed frameworks for teaching the subject. None, however, appears to provide as much detail on how to do it as "Lessons from History."

Continued on Page 18

Jeff Stine

A hallway at Mark Twain Elementary School is lined with projects that students must prepare as part of the school's performance-based assessment program.

Testing Shifts From Memorization To Investigation in Littleton, Colo.

By Robert Rothman

LITTLETON, COLO.—To help her students begin working on a research project that will cap their final year at Mark Twain Elementary School here, Margie Zyzda, a 5th-grade teacher, is working with them on the topics they propose to investigate.

She takes aside one pupil, who has proposed studying the question: What are the different types of cats?

"My concern," Ms. Zyzda tells the student, "is that you will come up with a list."

Perhaps, she suggests, the pupil could study how the cats are different. Or, compare a lion with a domestic cat.

The difference between the student's initial idea and Ms. Zyzda's suggestions is at the heart of what Twain and a rapidly growing number of schools—including nearby Littleton High School—are attempting to do.

Rather than ask students to memorize facts, these schools are designing assessments that ask them to use their knowledge to solve problems and to think critically, and to demonstrate their abilities

Continued on Page 22

In a Pilot Study, Student Writing In Class Gauged

Reforms Are Rare, NAEP Results Show

By Robert Rothman

WASHINGTON—In what top federal officials called a significant advance in the state of the art, the National Assessment of Educational Progress has concluded that it can conduct a large-scale assessment of students' writing abilities by using their classroom work.

Releasing a study based on in-class writing samples from about 2,000 4th and 8th graders, the officials said last week that NAEP was able to classify and evaluate widely different pieces on a comparable basis.

But the results of the pilot study, the officials acknowledged, suggest that the capabilities of the assessment itself may have surpassed the level of writing instruction in many schools. Although the study was not based on a representative sample of students, it found little evidence of the types of practices school-based writing assessment is expected to capture, such as the use of "pre-writing" strategies and other techniques of the writing process and the composition of a broad range of pieces.

Diane S. Ravitch, the Education Department's assistant secretary for educa-

Continued on Page 24

Aiming for Literacy Across Two Generations, Even Start Teaches a Parent To Reach a Child

By Deborah L. Cohen

PEKIN, ILL.—Judy Bitner beams as she tells how her daughter, Ashley, at age 7, has already written her first book as part of a school project to encourage young authors. Her 3-year-old son, Bodie, meanwhile, is gaining an early appreciation of the written word from the stories his mother now reads to him each day.

But the 27-year-old single mother also has plenty to boast about in her own right. While Bodie attends an early-childhood program, Ms. Bitner pursues her own studies in an adjoining classroom in this central-Illinois community. Besides working on her own book—a project in which she takes obvious pride—she is honing her math, reading, and writing skills so she can earn a General Educational Development certificate. At the same time, she is mastering techniques to help stimulate her children's learning.

Ms. Bitner is a participant in Even Start, a federally funded program that combines adult-literacy and parenting training with early-childhood education in an effort to break the cycle of illiteracy that often passes from parent to child.

The Pekin Even Start Family Education Program provides educational services for parents and children, separately and together, at a center based in a technical high

Continued on Page 20

Duane R. Zehr

Lisa Smith reads to her 11-month-old daughter, Alexis Hoyle, as part of the Even Start program in Pekin, Ill.

Computer Educators: Network's Potential May Elude Schools

By Peter West

WASHINGTON—When Walter E. Massey, the director of the National Science Foundation, announced the signing of a groundbreaking cooperative agreement with the Education Department earlier this year, one program he said would benefit from the pact is the National Research and Education Network.

The network, now under development, is a high-speed computer system that by the mid-1990's will link the nation's premier supercomputing and research facilities using the latest in fiber-optics technology.

When fully deployed, Mr. Massey said, the N.R.E.N. "will allow every school to hook up to a supercomputer . . and will allow students to share data across the country and around the world."

Similarly, when D. Allan Bromley, President Bush's science adviser, joined Mr. Massey to discuss the role of the federal government in the reform of mathematics and science education before a Congressional panel last month, both touted the

Continued on Page 19

Also in the news

5 **Families in Poverty**
A new study finds younger families face dropping incomes and rising rates of child poverty.

28 **Cash for Credits**
Philadelphia's program rewarding teachers for taking college courses is raising a few eyebrows.

8 **Claiming the Title**
One year after launching America 2000, President Bush renews his claim to be the "Education President."

IN SUMMARY

Heading for Kindergarten
Most public schools do not do much in a systematic way to help preschoolers make the transition to kindergarten, a federal study concludes.
Page 4.

'Next Century' Winners
The RJR Nabisco Foundation has announced the awarding of a total of $9 million to 14 schools selected as winners in the final round of its "Next Century Schools" grant competition. **Page 5.**

Assessing Partnerships
Business-education partnerships in the United States and other Western nations are at a critical stage where they must show a long-term commitment to school reform, a new report says. **Page 10.**

Choice in San Antonio
Business leaders in San Antonio last week announced an educational choice program that will help fund private-school tuition for some 700 students from low-income families. **Page 14.**

Yonkers Settlement Approved
The Yonkers, N.Y., city council has approved an agreement to address housing segregation that had been linked, in a landmark federal court case, to segregation in the city's schools. **Page 14.**

Staring Down the Pentagon
A bill before the Illinois House seeks to force the federal government to increase its impact-aid payments or establish separate, fully funded schools on military bases.
Page 25.

'Middle States' Decision
Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander has renewed federal recognition of a regional accrediting agency that required institutions to meet a cultural-diversity standard.
Page 29.

Appointments	34
Ballot Box	30
Commentary	31 and 40
Deadlines	34
Federal File	28
Focus On:Curriculum	6
Health	12
Letters	33
Marketplace	35
Media	16
State Journal	25
Vocational Education	17

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ACROSS THE NATION

NATIONAL

Americans Favor Arts Courses In Curriculum, Survey Finds

A large majority of Americans wants to see arts courses included in the regular school curriculum, a national survey concludes.

The survey, conducted by Louis Harris & Associates for the American Council for the Arts, found that 91 percent of respondents said it was important for children to learn about the arts and to develop artistic skills in schools. Sixty-seven percent ranked the arts equal in importance to history or geography, 60 percent to math and science, and 53 percent to reading and writing.

A majority of those polled said they would be willing to see cuts in administrative costs, extracurricular activities, or sports to fund arts classes.

The poll was commissioned in part to garner public support for efforts to include arts in President Bush's America 2000 program, a council spokesman said. In recent months, the Administration has come under fire for failing to include arts in the program.

The firm polled a representative sample of 1,500 adults age 18 or older by telephone in February.

■ **The governing board of the American Association for Counseling and Development has voted to change the organization's name to the American Counseling Association.**

The name change, which takes effect July 1, is an effort to clarify the identity of the association's members and define what they do.

"Counseling is the common bond that ties all of our members together, regardless of their work setting," said Marianne H. Mitchell, the group's president. The name change, she said, should "promote a strong professional identity and reinforce unity of purpose."

The association represents some 60,000 members, including school counselors. ■

STATES

Mississippi Board Discontinues Basic-Skills Testing Program

The Mississippi Board of Education has voted to discontinue the Basic Skills Assessment Program, which was mandated in the state's landmark 1982 education-reform act.

Originally, the test was required for students in grades 3, 5, and 8. Last year, the state board voted to drop grades 3 and 8 from the program to save some $400,000. The state's 5th graders are scheduled to take the test for the final time next month.

State officials said the test measured only very basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, and that students in the state have made such progress in those areas that the test is no longer needed.

The Mississippi Federation of Teachers had been critical of the test and said it was pleased that it had been scrapped.

State Superintendent of Schools Richard Thompson appointed a 14-member testing task force in January that is charged with reviewing the state's overall testing program. That committee is expected to make its final recommendations this fall. ■

Rallying for Higher Wages

Akira Suwa/Philadelphia Inquirer

Mark Auxter, holding his daughter Abby, speaks out as a parent for higher day-care salaries at a rally in Philadelphia. Child-care advocates in cities across the nation held rallies, town meetings, center closings, and other activities on April 9 as part of a campaign to promote "worthy wages" for child-care workers.

DISTRICTS

U.S. Judge Rejects Challenge To 'Impressions' Reading Series

A federal judge has rejected an attempt by 11 parents in Woodland, Calif., to ban the controversial "Impressions" reading series from the local school-district curriculum.

In his April 3 ruling, U.S. District Judge William Shubb said the parents' claims that use of the literature-based reading series in schools violates the constitutional prohibition against establishment of religion in publicly funded institutions were not valid. Contrary to the group's claims, he said, the reading series did not promote witchcraft or "neo-Paganism" over any other religion.

"The Establishment Clause is not violated merely because a particular governmental sponsored activity happens to coincide or harmonize with the tenets of some or all religions," he said.

The decision was hailed as a "national victory" by People for the American Way, the constitutional-liberties group that represented the school district.

Lawyers for the American Family Association, the conservative religious group that represented the parents, said they would appeal the ruling.

■ **Two students from Woodland Middle School in East Meadow, N.Y., were killed when a chartered bus returning a school group from a class trip careened off a highway in the Adirondack Mountains 95 miles north of Albany.**

The incident occured on April 11 as a Gray Line motor coach was returning the students from a three-day trip to Montreal. According to witnesses, the bus had been tailgating a car at approximately 65 miles per hour on Interstate 87 when it struck the right guide rail, swerved across both lanes of the highway, then crashed through the left guide rail and down a 70-foot embankment.

Killed in the crash were David Jeffrey Levinton, age 12, and Michael Vincent Capozzi, 13. Most of the 25 other students and three teacher chaperoning the group were treated for minor injuries and released the next day.

State police said the accident was caused by speeding and driver inattention. Ticketed for speeding was the bus driver, Dennis D. Ellis, of Brooklyn, N.Y. Mr. Ellis has a history of driving accidents, including three reported accidents and two convictions. If found guilty of speeding, Mr. Ellis faces a one-year suspension of his chauffeur's license.

Essex County investigators are preparing a report that may be presented to a grand jury for possible criminal charges, officials said.

■ **A national advocacy group has filed a federal lawsuit against the District of Columbia public-school system charging that it has failed to comply with a federal law that requires schools to ensure that homeless children have access to educational services.**

Maria Foscarinis, the director of the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty, which filed the complaint against the city in U.S. District Court in Washington last week, said the suit marks the first time that a city has been sued under the education provisions of the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987.

Photos by Photopress

From left in photo on left, Nile Oldham, Michael Souders, Eric Lagergren, and Barry Diamondstone, all scientists at the N.I.S.T., helped conduct the curriculum audit. Thomas Natolly, above, believes many involved in the audit will be future allies of the district.

tential applicants to those who reside or work in the community or who have children in the public schools, nearly half of the volunteers were medical doctors or held doctorates in a scientific field, Mr. Natolly points out.

"It was surprising to me that we were able to get the caliber of people that we did," he says.

In addition to those like Dr. Wright, who are employed by local businesses, the teams of auditors included employees of the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the Burroughs Corporation, the U.S. Public Health Service, the National Institutes of Health, and the U.S. Army's chemical-warfare laboratory at nearby Fort Detrick.

"If we went out and hired those kinds of people to do this, it would cost a fortune," Mr. Farmer notes. "For us not to take advantage of this resource, I think would be overlooking a valuable opportunity."

The community also seemed to support the audit by responding in large numbers to a survey of teachers, students, parents, and former students that was conducted early in the process.

The response by local residents, participants point out, led to an unintended consequence of the audit: a cadre of parents and other adults with a vested interest in the performance of the school system.

"I don't think that when this [report] is finally accepted [the school board] will see the end of all this," says Barry Diamondstone, the deputy director of the N.I.S.T.'s chemical science and technology laboratory, who served on the high-school auditing committee.

And, Mr. Natolly believes, the school system can count on many of the scientists as allies as they attempt to implement their recommendations.

"I honestly believe that some [of them] felt that the science program needed a great deal of adjustment," he says. "And I think they found that many concerns and preconceived ideas [they had] going in were incorrect."

'Strong Points' Noted

But, despite such strong support, the audit process has not been without its restrictions and conflicts.

"They didn't evaluate teachers; we made that very clear," Mr. Natolly says. "But they were looking at curriculum, they were looking at materials, and they were looking at facilities."

Some volunteers say, though, that they felt the schools should do more to encourage students to view science as "hard work," not just an easy elective.

Michael Souders, a physicist at the N.I.S.T. and a member of the middle-school committee, argues that schools need to establish a smoother transition between elementary schools, where science is mostly discovery-based, and later grades, where more rigorous experimentation is stressed.

But many auditors also came away from the process with a new respect for teachers and teaching.

Nile Oldham, an N.I.S.T. physicist, says that, while local elementary teachers were not always well prepared to teach science, there were "certainly strong points" to the elementary-science curriculum.

He notes, for example, that two teachers obtained permission from their supervisors to teach a unit on spawning fish, setting up an obstacle course that pupils, in the role of salmon, were required to navigate.

"They attempted to go outside of the curriculum to teach meaningful science," he says, "and they were successful." ■

tive process suggest there are far more commonalities than differences on such issues as standards, alternative-assessment methods, choice—all the issues that are being debated in the 1990's.

Q. Would the association be looking to strike a higher profile in those debates in this country?

A. I . . . see the association as being interested in strengthening its voice in the national, as well as, potentially, the international scene, so as to become involved and to strengthen its potential to influence the major decisions that will affect education in this country and beyond.

Q. Over the last two decades, the organization's membership has grown from about 12,000 to 160,000. What do you think has accounted for that growth, and do you think the organization's membership has stabilized?

A. There are pros and cons about growing. I think probably there will be a reassessment of the composition of the membership as it relates to numbers, in view of addressing the notion of quantity versus quality in the future. That is not to suggest that we're not going to continue to increase the membership.

But we want to be sure the needs of the existing members are being met in the most efficient way possible, and that suggests that we need to be responsive to the needs of the membership. The rapid increase in members also has implications for the governance of the association.

Q. What do you see as the most important curriculum issue facing American education?

A. There are some critical issues I would mention that I think must not only be addressed but have the potential to affect public education in a most significant way. One of those is obviously early-childhood education, where up front you try to increase the life chances of youngsters at a very formative period of their development.

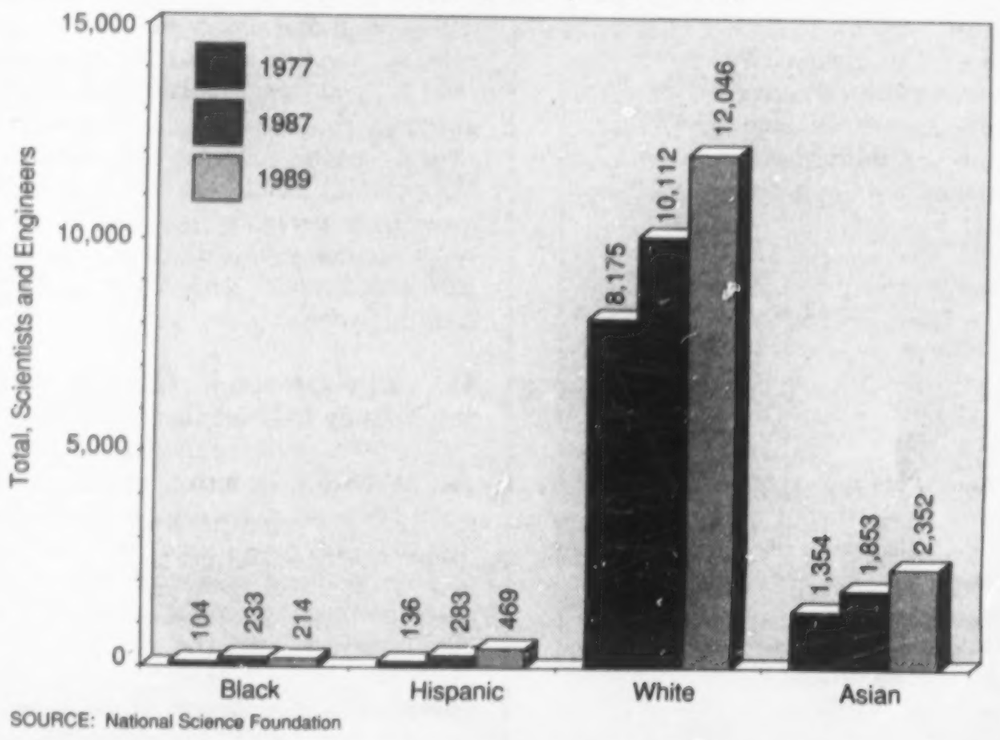
The second area is addressing the unique needs of youngsters who have been termed to be at-risk. That is to suggest addressing the needs of the haves as well as the have nots, and focusing on quality and equality of opportunity.

The third area is that of improving student performance. Another would be looking to alternative assessment tools and strategies. ■

DIMENSIONS

Science and Engineering Graduates

Number of Postdoctoral Scientists and Engineers, by Racial/Ethnic Group (in selected years, 1977-89)



SOURCE: National Science Foundation